

Strategies and Techniques for Teaching Children with Learning Disabilities: A Case  
Study of the Spring Reading Program

Hope Cowan  
Child and Youth Studies

Department of Graduate and Undergraduate  
Studies in Education

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Faculty of Education, Brock University  
St. Catharines, Ontario

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## Abstract

This case study explored strategies and techniques in order to assist individuals with learning disabilities in their academic achievement. Of particular focus was how a literacy-based program, titled *The Spring Reading Program*, utilizes effective tactics and approaches that result in academic growth. The Spring Reading Program, offered by the Learning Disabilities Association of Niagara Region (LDANR) and partnered with John McNamara from Brock University, supports children with reading disabilities academically. In addition, the program helps children increase their confidence and motivation towards literacy. I began this study by outlining the importance of reading followed by an exploration of what educators and researchers have demonstrated regarding effective literacy instruction for children with learning disabilities. I studied effective strategies and techniques in the Spring Reading Program by conducting a qualitative case study of the program. This case study subsequently presents in depth, 4 specific strategies: Hands-on activities, motivation, engagement, and one-on-one instruction. Each strategy demonstrates its effectiveness through literature and examples from the Spring Reading Program.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“A Child’s success in school and throughout life depend in large part on the ability to read’ (Laveault, 2003). In today’s society, approximately 20% of children struggle to become skilled readers (Armbruster, Lehr, Osborn, 2010). Proficient reading and writing skills are essential to children’s success (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). When children successfully learn to read at a young age they are able to read for learning and for pleasure (Laveault, 2003). However, those who struggle with reading have a much more difficult time in many areas (Laveault, 2003). Research reveals that when children are not skilled readers, they struggle not only academically but also behaviourally, socially, and emotionally (Laveault, 2003). Fortunately, children with learning disabilities (LD) have the capability to become successful in these areas with the help of educational practitioners. Educational practitioners can affect the direction children with learning disabilities take through explicit, intensive, and extensive literacy instruction. Consequently, it is critical educational practitioners know particular tactics and strategies that can help support individuals with learning disabilities.

There are several factors that contribute to the results of children with learning disabilities’ literacy success. These include hands-on activities, motivation, engagement, and one-on-one instruction. These four strategies are found to be significant contributors to the development of literacy skills (National Reading Panel, 2000). In addition, the National Reading Panel has identified six components to effective literacy instruction: phoneme awareness, phonics, fluency, guided oral reading, teaching vocabulary words and reading comprehension strategies. Through the implementation of the four teaching

strategies and the six components of literacy instruction, children with an LD will experience an increase in academic success.

Reading attainment during early instruction can lead to future reading success or failure. For that reason, poor readers are more likely to continue to be poor readers throughout their academic life if they do not receive proper literacy instruction at an early age. Numerous studies demonstrate that children with learning disabilities who receive literacy, including one-on-one tutoring, hands-on activities, motivation and engagement, demonstrate improvements much greater than children with learning disabilities who do not (National Reading Panel, 2000).

The objective of the current case study was to explore and describe techniques and strategies aimed to assist children with learning disabilities. I adopted a qualitative case study approach to document the tactics and approaches throughout the duration of the Spring Reading Program offered by the Learning Disabilities Association of Niagara. Specifically, I documented the program with field notes and photographic evidence. I hypothesized that the Spring Reading Program will effectively utilize specific techniques and strategies to support children with learning disabilities in their reading through the use of motivational tactics, individualized instruction, and hands-on activities. The findings of this case study will provide insight into ways in which interventional programs can assist children in academic success. In addition, the findings can assist educational practitioners in regards to how these strategies and techniques can be implemented into literacy within the classroom in order to help children with learning disabilities become successful readers.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

An individual's exposure to literacy begins as soon as a child is born. There are numerous important skills children need to build when they are young in order to read with ease and understanding. Over the past several decades, much research has been done around how children learn to read and write. Research suggests that many opportunities need to be encountered in order to become a skilled and confident reader over time (Armbruster et al., 2010). These opportunities include spoken language, print awareness, phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge, reading aloud, word recognition, invented spelling, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Although these opportunities are essential to reading success, research demonstrates that in today's society, too many children are struggling with learning to read (Armbruster et al., 2010). "Reading failure has exacted a tremendous long-term consequence for children's developing self-confidence and motivation to learn, as well as for their later school performance" (Armbruster et al., 2010, p. i). While learning to read is critical to children's overall well-being (Lyon, 1998), it is also important to remember that learning to read is hard work for children. While environmental factors, such as low socioeconomic status and single parent families, may contribute to difficulties reading before entering school, various factors increase the child's risk such as early phonological processing problems, and English as a second language (Armbruster et al., 2010). In addition, engagement is a major factor that can either increase or decrease children's reading difficulties; this includes the idea that there is a correlation between motivation and reading, also known as the Matthew effect. Through literacy programs, which

incorporate interventions focusing on building significant skills and include effective techniques to help children with learning disabilities or difficulties foster the development of reading and continue their lifelong path of learning. A review of literature will help exhibit these risk factors as well as how parents, teachers, and program developers can help prevent reading disabilities.

### The Reading Process

The reading process is a cumulative process that begins during early childhood and continues through the school years (Harlaar, Dale, & Plomin, 2007). In order to become an effective reader, a child must start from the beginning and build upwards. Specifically, children must become aware of the systematic correspondences between letter and sounds, learn the rules to these correspondences and be able to identify words rapidly and precisely (Harlarr et al., 2007). During this period, children are acquiring phonemic awareness, spelling, blending and segmenting, phonics, sight words, and vocabulary, thus learning to read. By acquiring these skills, children are learning more and, therefore, their knowledge is growing. When children master these areas of learning how to read, they gradually begin to shift from learning to read to reading to learn. This stage includes the acquisition of reading comprehension. The ability to have good comprehension leads to bright children, leading to effective readers. The reading process can be illustrated in a hierarchy in Figure 1. This reading hierarchy illustrates the reading process as an inverted pyramid. This model begins with emergent literacy skills including letter-sound understanding, phonological awareness, and print awareness. It then leads into word identification and fluency. The hierarchy ends in the ultimate goal, reading comprehension.

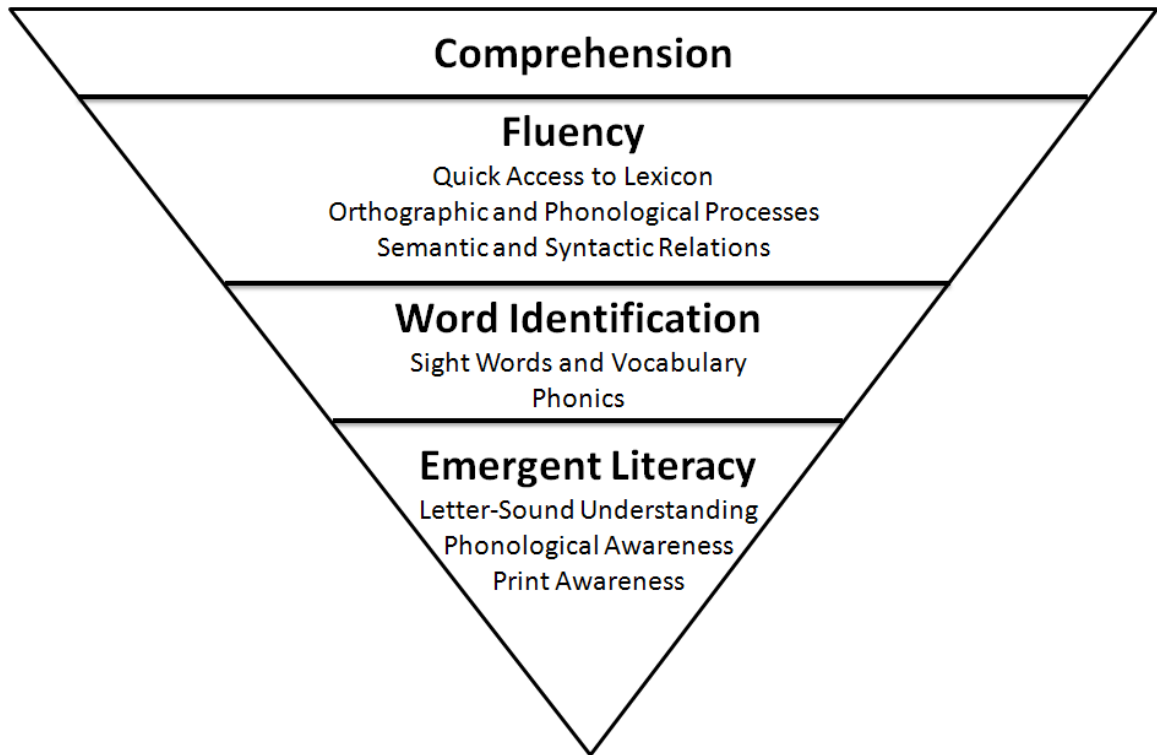


Figure 1. Reading hierarchy. (Holtzheuser, McNamara, Short, & Keay, 2014)

## Components of Reading

As demonstrated in Figure 1, the reading process is divided into four areas of literacy development: emergent literacy, word identification, fluency, and comprehension. Each area of literacy is essential to one's literacy success. Although these skills are displayed separately, when interrelated together, they provide the most optimal effectiveness in teaching children to read successfully.

Emergent literacy. "The preschool years represent a critical time period during which young children develop a broad array of foundational emergent literacy skills" (Cabell, Justice, Zucker, & Kilday, 2009). Emergent literacy is defined as the developmental foundations of fluent reading and writing skills that children need to acquire before they reach formal reading teaching (Cabell et al., 2009). Better emergent literacy skills are related to better spelling and reading outcome for children (Cabell et al., 2009). Research reveals a positive correlation between children's emergent literacy skills and later reading ability (Cabell et al., 2009; Lonigan, Burgess, & Anthony, 2000). Consequently, it is important to identify children with poor emergent literacy skills early (Cabell et al., 2009). Studies demonstrate a relationship between school and children's literacy development (Masseti & Bracken, 2010). Specifically, when children are placed in a classroom where emergent literacy is accentuated, higher emergent literacy skills are present (Masseti & Bracken, 2010). Furthermore, the home environment plays a significant aspect in the acquisition of emergent literacy skills (Lacour, McDonald, Thomason, & Tissington, 2011). Emergent literacy is an essential component in the life long process of reading (Zygouris-Coe, 2001).



Phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness is an important component that helps make one an effective reader. Since the structure of the English writing system is alphabetic, researchers believe phonemic awareness strongly contributes to helping children learn to read (National Reading Panel, 2000). It is additionally a skill that begins to develop at a very young age (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Phonemic awareness is defined as “the ability to notice, think about and work with the individual sounds in spoken words” (Armbruster et al., 2010). In order to read print, children must learn that words are made up of sounds (Armbruster et al., 2010). Thus, when one begins to recognize that there are small sounds within a word, they are developing phonemic awareness. Consequently, one's proficiency at reading determines how much phonemic awareness one has (Armbruster et al., 2010). Overall, children who demonstrate strong phonemic awareness skills have an easier time learning to read and spell as opposed to those who have little or no phonemic awareness skills (Armbruster et al., 2010).

Teachers play a critical role in children's ability to learn how to read. “Teachers can build their students' skills efficiently and effectively” (Armbruster et al., 2010, p. ii). Teachers teach children how to successfully read. In particular, effective reading teachers deliver explicit instruction in both phonemic awareness and phonological awareness (Armbruster et al., 2010). This is done through numerous activities that focus on building phonemic awareness, such as blending, segmentation, isolation, identity, categorization, deletion, addition, substitution, and consistent encouragement to use what they know about the sounds that make up words (Armbruster et al., 2010).

Strong phonemic awareness skills assist children in numerous ways in addition to

reading. For instance, effectively teaching phonemic awareness improves children's reading comprehension due to its influence on word reading (Armbruster et al., 2010). Specifically, in order for children to understand what they are reading, the pace and accuracy of the word read must be mastered (Armbruster et al., 2010). This allows the children to focus on the meaning of what they are reading and not so much what the word is (Armbruster et al., 2010). In addition, phonemic awareness instruction aids spelling. When children are breaking a word into separate sounds (segmenting), children become more conscious that the sounds and letters are related (Armbruster et al., 2010). As a result, while spelling words, they are able to relate the sounds to the letters (Armbruster et al., 2010).

Teaching phonemic awareness is not enough to help children learn how to read. Researchers believe phonemic awareness instruction must be taught effectively (Armbruster et al., 2010). In order for phonemic awareness instruction to be taught effectively, several things must be taken into consideration. Researchers believe that phonemic awareness instruction results in higher success rates of reading and spelling when children learn to use letters as they manipulate phonemes rather than the phonemes being alone (Armbruster et al., 2010). Therefore, it is important to blend phonemes and segment sounds to help children see how phonemic awareness relates to their writing, reading, and spelling of words (Armbruster et al., 2010). Moreover, when teaching phoneme manipulation, teachers should focus on one or two types rather than several (Armbruster et al., 2010). Research demonstrates that children who are taught one to two types of phoneme manipulation at a time have higher reading and spelling skills than those who are taught three or more types of phoneme manipulation (Armbruster et al.,

2010).

Researchers and educators believe phonemic awareness instruction should focus on blending and segmenting word activities based on each child's individual needs (Armbruster et al., 2010). In particular, young children or children with low academics will not improve in reading and writing if they are participating in difficult activities. An educator should begin with easy activities and move on to more difficult ones when children can accomplish such tasks (Armbruster et al., 2010). In addition, phonemic awareness instruction is more effective when it is clear about the relationship between phonemic awareness and reading (Armbruster et al., 2010).

Research demonstrates that when educators teach children one to two types of phoneme manipulation, focus on blending and segmenting activities, and instruct children to manipulate phonemes along with letters, children should essentially learn to read and spell. Furthermore, teaching phonemic awareness should be taught in small groups and take no more than 20 hours (Armbruster et al., 2010). Therefore, providing effective phonemic awareness instruction in addition to the five other components should result in successful reading and writing for children.

Word identification. "Word identification is the process of determining the pronunciation and some meaning of a word encountered in print" (Combs, 2011, p. 65). Word identification is a significant skill for the development of reading (Molfese et al., 2011). When children are capable of identifying words in the younger years, they are more likely to have stronger literacy skills as they grow older (Molfese et al., 2011). As children become skilled readers, they are automatically able to recognize words, fluently read through text, and when they reach an unknown word, they are able to use their print

skills to determine the word (Combs, 2011). However, when children struggle with their literacy skills, they tend to struggle through the text, sound out words letter-sound by letter sound, or settle on words that are not connected to the text (Combs, 2011).

Researchers have determined four strategies that help emerging readers with word identification development (Combs, 2011). These four skills are: decoding, analogizing, predicting, and recognizing (Combs, 2011). Decoding, known as the ability to pronounce words when encountered, allows children to use their decoding skills to recognize words (Combs, 2011). Analogizing refers to using known words or parts of word to help when identifying unknown words (Combs, 2011). The ability to predict aids children with word identification by using letter cues, prior knowledge, or the surrounding context to identify an unknown word (Combs, 2011). Lastly, children are able to recognize certain words from their memory without having to decode, analyze, or predict (Combs, 2011).

It is important to recognize that word identification is not a natural skill. Children need to be taught how to find the patterns in print that will eventually lead to automatic word identification (Combs, 2011). It is necessary for children to learn a variety of word identification strategies to aid in recognizing unfamiliar words.

Phonics. Phonics is described as “the relationship between the sounds of spoken words and the individual letters or groups of letters that represent those sounds in written words” (Armbruster et al., 2010, p. 11). Phonics is an essential component in learning to read and for one to become a successful reader. When children become proficient in phonics, they are able to sound out words they have never seen before without having memorized them first and recognize familiar words quickly (National Reading Panel, 2000). Consequently, learning phonics is extremely important to beginning readers and

those who struggle with reading as it allows children to see the bond between the sounds of spoken words and letters (Armbruster et al., 2010). Overall, understanding the alphabetic principles contribute significantly to children's ability to read words in isolation and in connected text.

Effective instruction of phonics by educators is critical to children's reading and writing success. Children need to learn a system of remembering how to read words. The teacher uses explicit instruction to aid children in learning letter-sound relationship. This is done in a well-defined and valuable sequence (Armbruster et al., 2010). In addition, it is important that educators effectively teach children that there are irregular words that children will encounter often, but do not follow the letter-sound relationships (Armbruster et al., 2010).

Research demonstrates that in order to make a meaningful impact on children's reading success, the instruction needs to be systematic and explicit. When phonics is taught in a systematic and explicit way, students directly learn the letter-sound relationships needed to read and write successfully (Armbruster et al., 2010). In addition, they receive significant practice in utilizing these relationships while reading and writing through books and stories that include many words that can be decoded by letter-sound relationships (Armbruster et al., 2010).

When children master phonics skills, they enhance their word recognition, spelling, and reading comprehension skills as well. Research demonstrates that when children receive systematic and explicit phonics instruction, they have better spelling and reading abilities than children who did not receive this type of instruction (Armbruster et al., 2010). Additionally, studies conclude that a child's ability to comprehend text is

enhanced when learning phonics systematically and explicit due to the ability to read rapidly and accurately (Armbruster et al., 2010). Overall, partaking in systematic and explicit phonics instruction helps decrease future reading difficulties in at-risk children and aids children in overcoming reading difficulties (Armbruster et al., 2010).

Researchers and educators believe a systematic and explicit phonics program clearly distinguishes significant letter-sound relationships in a logical instructional sequence (Armbruster et al., 2010). In addition, they should incorporate reading and writing activities that allow them to apply the relationships they are learning (Armbruster et al., 2010). Reading and writing activities can include practice writing sheets or short books or stories containing words that incorporate certain letter-sound relationships (Armbruster et al., 2010).

Systematic and explicit phonics instruction is extremely important to the success of children's reading and writing. Phonics instruction improves children's comprehension, spelling, and overall reading skills. Teachers play a critical role in making this happen. Systematic and explicit phonics instruction should be taught for roughly 2 years (Armbruster et al., 2010). Usually, this occurs from kindergarten to the end of the second grade (Armbruster et al., 2010). Additionally, teaching phonics effectively can be done in a variety of ways including whole class, small groups, or individuals all depending on the individual needs of the students (Armbruster et al., 2010). Overall, phonics instruction when combined with phoneme awareness, fluency, guided oral reading, teaching vocabulary words, and reading comprehension will help children achieve success in writing and reading.

Vocabulary words. Researchers have been studying the importance of vocabulary

instruction since 1925 (National Reading Panel, 2000). This is because vocabulary takes a significant place in learning to read. It places a vital role in areas such as comprehension, letter-sound relationships, and fluency. Overall, research demonstrates that strong vocabulary is connected to how well one comprehends what one reads and one's school success (Armbruster et al., 2010).

Vocabulary refers to words we need to know in order to communicate effectively (Armbruster et al., 2010). Vocabulary is described in two ways: oral vocabulary and reading vocabulary (Armbruster et al., 2010). Oral vocabulary is based on words that one uses to speak or recognize in listening. Reading vocabulary is described as the words one recognizes or utilizes in print (Armbruster et al., 2010). As children read words in texts, it is then mapped onto the oral words the children bring to the task (Armbruster et al., 2010). Consequently, in order to effectively listen, speak, read, and write, one must develop vocabulary.

When children do not have a developed vocabulary, they struggle to derive meaning from the text (Armbruster et al., 2010). As a result, they begin to read less leading to less chances to encounter new words to learn them (Armbruster et al., 2010). Thus, “good readers read more, become better readers and learn more words; poor readers read less, become poorer readers, and learn fewer words” (Stanovich, 1986). Moreover, research concludes that when children receive explicit vocabulary instruction, it improves their comprehension and letter-sound recognition.

Vocabulary is learned both indirectly and directly. However, research demonstrates that the majority of the time vocabulary is learned indirectly and only some of the time it is learned directly (Armbruster et al., 2010). Indirect vocabulary learning

refers to learning vocabulary when children hear or see words used in various contexts (Armbruster et al., 2010). Direct vocabulary learning is described as being taught individual words and word-learning strategies explicitly (Armbruster et al., 2010).

Indirect vocabulary learning occurs on a daily basis through experiences with oral and written language. For instance, children participate in conversations with other people including adults. This allows children to hear adults repeat words many times and use new and interesting words. Children also learn through adults reading to them. As previously noted, reading aloud is essential to reading success. In relation to vocabulary, when adults read aloud, they can stop to explain unfamiliar words and engage children in a conversation about the text (Armbruster et al., 2010). This allows children to learn new words and concepts as well as connect them to their previous experiences. Furthermore, children reading on their own results in children better able to encounter more words, thus learning more word meaning (Armbruster et al., 2010).

Direct vocabulary learning allows one to learn words that are not part of children's daily encounters (Armbruster et al., 2010). In particular, direct instruction includes specific word instruction and taught word-learning strategies. This can construct stronger word meaning knowledge, resulting in better listening and reading comprehension as well as vocabulary learning.

Although direct vocabulary learning results in less vocabulary acquisition than indirect vocabulary learning, it is still essential that teachers incorporate learning experiences in their classroom (Armbruster et al., 2010). For instance, reading aloud to students allows for new words to be heard in a variety of different texts. Discuss the text before, during, and after reading it and, most importantly, have conversations about new



words and concepts and how they can relate these words to their previous encounters and thoughts as well as emphasize words that one will see time and time again (Armbruster et al., 2010). In addition, it is vital that educators encourage and motivate their students to read on their own both inside and outside the classroom (Armbruster et al., 2010).

Teachers can also use classroom discussion time to use new words and urge students to use these words when they speak and write.

Researchers stress the importance of not directly teaching students all unknown words (Armbruster et al., 2010). This is because there are too many unknown words leading to too much class time and less time for more successful lessons (Armbruster et al., 2010). In addition, most students are able to understand the text even when they are unable to identify the meaning of every word. Moreover, it is important that students have their own time to learn unknown words and unknown meaning of words. Words may be taught directly only when (a) they are significant for comprehending a concept or the text, (b) they are words that occur in text often, (c) they have multiple meanings, and (d) they are spelt the same but pronounced differently (Armbruster et al., 2010). Teachers also need to provide students with effective word-learning strategies to learn words and word meaning they do not know. This can include how to use dictionaries and other reference aids and how to use information about word parts in order to understand word meaning and how to use context clues to figure out the meaning of the word (Armbruster et al., 2010).

Vocabulary instruction is essential to children's reading success (Armbruster et al., 2010). Not only is vocabulary knowledge connected to comprehension skills and word-sound recognition, but it is connected to knowledge of the world as well. When

children have knowledge about the world, they are going to be able to understand what they read better. Thus, teachers play a significant role in the development of vocabulary skills leading to students' overall reading abilities.

Fluency. Research demonstrates that the fluency instruction is often neglected in the classrooms (Armbruster et al., 2010). However, fluency is a critical component of skilled reading. Also, fluency provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension (Armbruster et al., 2010). Fluency development begins early and is believed to develop over a considerable amount of time and practice (Armbruster et al., 2010).

Fluency is described as the ability to read text with greater speed, accuracy, and expression (National Reading Panel, 2000). In addition, fluency allows children to better understand what is read through word recognition (National Reading Panel, 2000). Fluency changes based on what children are reading, how familiar they are with the words present, and the amount of practice they have reading text (National Reading Panel, 2000). Researchers believe that through practice, reading becomes automatic due to children's ability to recognize words and grouping words together to aid in understanding what is being read (Armbruster et al., 2010). Fluent readers read with ease producing a natural sound as if they were speaking. They are able to concentrate on what the text means and make connections between the text and their knowledge (National Reading Panel, 2000). Consequently, when children have not yet mastered fluency, they tend to read slowly, creating a choppy and plodding sound as they read word-by-word (Armbruster et al., 2010). As a result of focusing much attention on decoding the word, they have little or no understanding of the text (National Reading Panel, 2000).

When children become fluent readers, they begin to read with expression (National Reading Panel, 2000). This is a result of being able to divide the text into meaningful chunks (National Reading Panel, 2000). These chunks include phrases and clauses. In addition, readers learn when to break appropriately within the sentence and at the end, as well as when to change emphasis and tone (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Successful fluency skills will only be present if children receive effective fluency instruction by educators. Most children do not start out reading fluently. However, children should be demonstrating successful fluency skills by the end of grade 1 (Armbruster et al., 2010). In addition, teachers need to understand that word recognition plays a critical aspect in fluency (National Reading Panel, 2000). Word recognition accuracy is not the end point in teaching reading skills as fluency exemplifies a level of knowledge beyond word recognition accuracy. Likewise, children may be proficient at word recognition on a list or individually. However, they may not be able to read the same words fluently in a sentence.

According to researchers, there are two different approaches to teaching fluency: repeated and monitored oral reading (also known as the fourth component, guided oral reading) and independent silent reading (National Reading Panel, 2000). Repeated and monitored reading results in children reading passages aloud many times and receiving feedback and guidance from their teachers (National Reading Panel, 2000). Independent silent reading results in children reading greatly on their own (National Reading Panel, 2000). However, repeated and monitored oral reading has been found to improve reading fluency and overall reading achievement. Research demonstrates reading aloud repeatedly enhances comprehension, word recognition, and speed and accuracy in

addition to fluency (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Teachers can do a variety of things to help children become fluent readers. This includes things such as (a) reading aloud to children and modeling fluent reading, (b) monitoring children's progress, (c) having students read passages repeatedly, and (d) providing much opportunity for them to read books at their level (National Reading Panel, 2000). Researchers and educators suggest modeling fluent reading and then having students reread the text on their own. Consequently, this allows students to learn how a reader's voice can help text make sense. In addition, have students reread the same passage many times both silently and aloud. This can be done in various ways; for instance, student-adult reading, choral reading, tape assisted reading, partner reading, and readers' theatre (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Fluency is an essential skill to develop in order to be a successful reader and writer. Teachers should be modeling fluent reading to their class daily and having their students reread the passages several times. Teachers play a critical role in this process; therefore, it is vital that they incorporate activities into their classroom daily to help students develop fluency skills and not just word recognition accuracy.

Guided oral reading. Guided oral reading is the ability to read out loud while receiving guidance and feedback from skilled readers (National Reading Panel, 2000). As previously noted, research demonstrates that guided oral reading enhances reading fluency, comprehension, word recognition, and overall reading achievement (National Reading Panel, 2000). Consequently, there is a relationship between guided oral reading instruction and the development of fluency as children are increasing their oral reading fluency by rereading passages aloud.

It is necessary that educators encourage their students to participate in guided oral reading. Research concludes that classroom instruction that promotes repeated oral reading while providing guidance and feedback results in successful reading skills, specifically for those who have learning difficulties (National Reading Panel, 2000).

The National Reading Panel (2000) provides examples of how educators can promote guided oral reading into classrooms; for instance, repeated reading, radio reading, paired reading and neurological impress. These types of activities, while receiving guidance and feedback, allow children to improve their reading abilities by reading quicker and more accurate as well as with expression and knowledge.

In general, it is important that educators encourage their students to read more and provide them with various activities to participate in guided oral reading. As demonstrated by researchers, guided oral reading improves one's skills in word recognition, fluency, and comprehension as well as their overall reading achievement. Guided oral reading is connected to the instruction of fluency; thus, together and combined with the four other components of effective teaching techniques; they can help with children's reading success.

Reading comprehension. Reading comprehension refers to getting meaning from what we read (Armbruster et al., 2010). It is significant to the development of children's reading abilities and their overall academic success. For over 30 years, research has displayed that comprehension instruction helps individuals understand what they read, remember what they read and communicate about what they read to others. As children become good readers, they become purposeful and active (Armbruster et al., 2010).

When readers are able to read words, but are not able to understand the text they are reading, they are not really reading (Armbruster et al., 2010). Consequently, readers normally develop strategies to help get meaning as they read. Comprehension strategies are described as techniques that help children understand what they are reading (National Reading Panel, 2000). When children use comprehension strategies, they become purposeful, active readers, who are in control of their own reading comprehension (Armbruster et al., 2010). Overall, research demonstrates that when children receive explicit or formal instruction of these strategies, it leads to enhancements in comprehension skills.

Scientific research has established that there are six strategies proven to improve comprehension. The first strategy is monitoring comprehension. Therefore, when one excels at monitoring their comprehension, they are about to know when they understand what they read and when they do not (Armbruster et al., 2010). The second strategy is using graphic and semantic organizers. This strategy aids students in concentrating on concepts and how one concept relates to another concept (Armbruster et al., 2010). Generating questions is the third strategy. When children are able to ask questions, their active processing of text and their comprehension is enhanced (Armbruster et al., 2010). Another strategy is recognizing story structure. In order to have an appreciation, knowledge, and memory for text, one must be able to distinguish the story structure (Armbruster et al., 2010). The last strategy is known as summarizing. This strategy helps children generate main ideas, connect main ideas, eliminate uncritical information, and remember what they read (Armbruster et al., 2010).

Through the implementation of explicit comprehension instruction in a classroom

setting, children will be able to develop strategies that aid in their development of reading skills. To teach comprehension strategies successfully, teachers should demonstrate the particular strategy, explain why it is significant, and how, where, and when to utilize it. A teacher acts out on explicit comprehension strategies such as direct explanation, teacher modeling, guided practice, application, and cooperative learning (Armbruster et al., 2010). Students will then be provided with activities to practice the strategy until they are able to use the specific strategy.

Researchers state that in order to model how good readers get meaning from a text, a teacher should read a variety of text out loud to their students on a regular basis and discuss the text before, during, and after (Armbruster et al., 2010). Also, in order to demonstrate how to use strategies to get meaning from the text, a teacher needs to listen to children read aloud and provide feedback by correcting their mistakes and provoke questions about the text.

Reading comprehension instruction begins in the primary grades. Students need to learn to read in order to read to learn. However, starting the instruction of reading comprehension in the early years allows for a foundation for reading to begin to be built (Armbruster et al., 2010). This will allow readers to begin making sense out of book and construct meaning. Comprehension strategies should be implemented in all natural learning situations. Activities, such as summarizing, graphic organizers, prior knowledge, mental imagery, and asking questions, are all strategies that teachers should use to implement comprehension skills (Armbruster et al., 2010). In general, comprehension is an essential skill to establish, as it is the reason to read.

### Factors Contributing to Poor Reading

There are several elements that affect one's ability to read skilfully. This includes low socio-economic status, single parent families, processing problems and English as a second language (ESL). The following will discuss these factors further in detail.

#### Environmental Factors

Children usually come across literacy in their home environment long before participating in learning to read in school (Hwa Wei & Yi Ling, 2009). There are particular environmental risk factors that can contribute to children being at-risk for a learning disability. For instance, children who live in a low socioeconomic status (SES) home environment as well as children who come from a single parent family have a higher risk for reading difficulties. It is recognized that exposure to literacy in the home environment as well as reading resources that are provided to the child by a parent are correlated to the child's reading development and progress in a classroom (Hwa Wei & Yi Ling, 2009). The interaction of home literacy between parent(s) and a child as well as the education resources that are provided to the child help shape reading habits, behaviour and views (Hwa Wei & Yi Ling, 2009). It is significant to explore how environmental risk factors such as socioeconomic status and single parent families can influence a child's literacy development.

Low socioeconomic status. "Children from low-income families are often significantly less ready for school than their more advantaged peers" (Jeon et al., 2011).



It is recognized that children who come from a low SES are more likely to be associated with poor levels of reading achievement (Duncan & Seymour, 2000). Researchers have determined that home literacy, such as the number of books owned and parental distress, help explain children's reading outcomes (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). In addition, research demonstrates a correlation between SES and children's initial reading competences is mediated by their home literacy environment, number of books available owned, parental involvement in the school, parental role strain, and warmth and provision of childcare previous to kindergarten (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). Furthermore, children from low SES families may demonstrate difficulties with vocabulary, sounds, phonemes, rhyming, and letter name knowledge (Bowey, 1995).

Single parent family. Single parent mothers identified themselves as more stressed than dual families (Blake, Macdonald, Bayrami, Agosta, & Millian, 2006). In addition, single parent families are found to demonstrate more critical proclamation, questions, and orders compared to dual parent families (Blake et al., 2006). Consequently, children from single-parent families are more likely to demonstrate poor educational attainment than children from nonsingle-parent families (Blake et al., 2006). Moreover, single parent mothers display low involvement in their child's school compared to dual families (Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, & Ortiz, 2008).

#### Processing Problem

“The term phonological processing refers to any task that require awareness and/or manipulation of the phonological structure of language, as well as tasks that require the use of a phonological code for representing language” (Nitttrouer, 1999). Existing studies reveal that many individuals with reading problems have difficulties

segmenting syllables in phonemes whereas good readers do not portray this issue (Nitttrouer, 1999). In addition, children with poor phonological awareness display difficulties coding linguistic material and comprehending sentences (Nitttrouer, 1999). Furthermore, many children with poor reading ability have difficulty storing long-word sequences in the working memory, which is needed to comprehend complex syntax (Nitttrouer, 1999). Consequently, children with processing problems experience issues in phonetic structure and the ability to store and receive language in the working memory (Nitttrouer & Burton, 2001). In general, poor readers struggle accessing phonological structure resulting in difficulty reading (Nitttrouer, 1999).

#### English as a Second Language

It is known that parent-child interaction in the home environment is critical for literacy development. However, little is known about the effect of parent-child reading in the home environment on second language acquisition (Chow, McBride-Chang, & Cheung, 2010). Research demonstrates that although children are able to comprehend directions in English, they have trouble understanding text. Thus, when children have poor knowledge of the English language, they are more likely to have difficulty learning literacy (Sen & Blatchford, 2001). Consequently, ESL children demonstrate difficulty in areas such as phonological processing, lexical access, word reading, fluency, reading comprehension, and working memory (Lipka & Siegel, 2007).

#### Effective Practices for Children with Reading Difficulties

Children with learning disabilities can greatly improve with many effective practices. These effective practices include effective programming, engagement, one-on-one instruction, and scaffolding and motivation. These practices are explored below.

## Effective Programming

Learning the letters of the alphabet, oral vocabulary, phoneme awareness, and print concepts is a major landmark in literacy acquisition. Previous research has found a significant correlation between letter knowledge, phonological awareness, print awareness, oral vocabulary, and the acquirement of literacy (Blaiklock, 2004). Not only does the research portray that these skills influence reading but these skills may be a consequence of reading (Blaiklock, 2004). Overall, effective programming can significantly impact scores on reading tasks (Blaiklock, 2004).

## Engagement

Literacy development shares particular characteristics significant to motivation and interest (Nolen, 2007). Research has shown that highly motivated children read three times more outside of school than their less motivated peers (Morgan & Fuchs, 2007). Thus, poor readers are more likely to be unmotivated to read. Consequently, research shows that this lack of motivation to read is usually portrayed within the first year of school (Morgan & Fuchs, 2007). In addition, low motivation in the early years impacts children's motivation to read in the later years. Thus, the relationship between poor reading and lack of motivation may increase or increasingly influence each other, which can lead to long-term reading failure (Morgan & Fuchs, 2007). Research demonstrates the correlation between poor readers and motivation affects children's ability to develop social meaning of literacy skills that are co-constructed by students and teachers within the classroom (Nolen, 2007).

### One-on-one Instruction

Various researchers over the past decades have examined the effectiveness of one-on-one tutoring programs in reading for vulnerable readers (Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes, & Moody, 2000). Much research suggests that children who receive one-on-one tutoring outperform students who did not receive tutoring in more than one area of literacy. “One-to-one instruction, provided as a supplement to classroom teaching, is generally considered to be the most effective way of increasing students’ achievement” (Elbaum et al., 2000, p. 605). Additionally, research confirms that the efficacy of the individualized tutoring is especially high for those individuals who are identified with a learning disability (Elbaum, et al., 2000).

Numerous studies on this topic have been conducted and a majority of the results conclude that one-on-one tutoring is an effective instructional technique (Elbaum et al., 2000). In addition, not only is empirical research validating this idea, classroom teachers are stating the same thing. Elbaum et al. (2000) discovered that classroom teachers are infrequently able to deliver the perfect teaching practice, which is believed to be adult-delivered individualized instruction.

In a long-term study conducted by Allor and McCathren (2004) on the success of a well-designed tutoring program, they were able to discover that children who received individualized tutoring made greater academic gains than their untutored peers. Additional research reveals that by the end of the intervention duration, one-on-one tutored children improved in phonological reading skills, word recognition, and reading fluency (Vadasy, Jenkins, & Pool, 2000). Moreover, 1 year after the intervention

individualized tutored children continued to portray a large advantage over their nontutored peers (Vadasy et al., 2000).

### Scaffolding and Motivation

Children who perform poorly academically typically are less motivated to learn (Al Otaiba, Schatschneider, & Silverman, 2005). Motivating children with learning disabilities to succeed can be done through positive tutor-child relationship, building on the child's interests and capabilities, modeling, scaffolding, reinforcing, responding to errors, and maximizing student engagement are all strategies that can be used to build one's motivation, leading to overall success.

Research demonstrates that children receive modeling, scaffolding and responsiveness to students' errors from their tutor (Al Otaiba et al., 2005). In addition, tutors develop a strong rapport with the children with whom they work. The reason behind this may be that during training the tutors were taught specific techniques to help students get on the path to reading through scaffolding (Al Otaiba et al., 2005). Overall, research reveals that successful reading programs need to provide tutors with proper training to scaffold children's learning (Al Otaiba et al., 2005).

Providing vulnerable readers with the chance to engage in literacy activities that focus on crucial early literacy skills is significant. Allor and McCathren (2004) discovered that at-risk children tend to engage in literacy activities less; therefore, they are not able to practice crucial early literacy skills. However, when at-risk children participate in an individualized tutoring program, through scaffolding and other techniques, these children are able to build their confidence and motivation to read.

Studies show that scaffolding is a significant principle to include in their program (Allor & McCathren, 2004).

### The Matthew Effect

“The 'Matthew effect' refers to a pattern of increasing advantage or disadvantage following initial advantage or disadvantage” (Morgan, Farkas, & Hibel, 2008, p. 187). According to Morgan et al. (2008), children who foster rapid acquisition of reading skills, also known as the reading rich, not only read more frequently but also enjoy reading at a young age. However, children who portray difficulty acquiring reading skills, also known as the reading poor, develop a negative attitude for reading and practice less frequently (Morgan et al., 2008). Research demonstrates that children most at risk of experiencing a Matthew effect in reading are children who come from low SES families, children who enter school as poor readers, and children at risk of having a reading disability (Morgan et al., 2008). Therefore, over time the better readers get better and the poor readers become poorer (Bast & Reitsma, 1998).

### Conclusion

Reading is a complex process that develops over time. Emergent literacy, word identification, fluency, and comprehension are all essential skills that one needs to be proficient at in order to succeed in reading and writing. Although the basics of reading, word recognition, and fluency can be learned in a few years, reading to learn subject matter does not occur automatically once students have learned to read. Thus, it is important to remember that reading skills are not developed right away. Reading skills take time to properly develop. Children need to learn to read before they are able to read to learn. In addition, there are many factors that affect one's ability to read proficiently

such as low SES, single parent families, processing problems and English as a second language (ESL).

In general, reading is an essential skill to possess in order to succeed in life and teachers hold in their hands the path to this success through effectively teaching these six skills. The following discusses strategies educators can do in order to help children with learning disabilities become better readers. “The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go” (Dr. Seuss, 1978).

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

My research study is a qualitative case study aimed at documenting strategies and techniques that enhance children with learning disabilities academic success in the Spring Reading Program. The Spring Reading Program is a literacy program offered through the Learning Disabilities Association of Niagara Region in partnership with John McNamara from Brock University. The Spring Reading Program is a one-on-one tutoring program available to children in the Niagara Region who are 5 to 12 years of age and who are falling behind in their reading due to a potential or diagnosed reading disability. The literacy program, described in further detail below, allows children to be paired with a tutor who develops an individual reading program. Through one-on-one instruction, children and tutors work on phonics, sight words, fluency, reading, comprehension, spelling, grammar, and more. Furthermore, the Spring Reading Program focuses on strengthening children's motivation and confidence towards reading through motivational workstations including success graphs and goal setting. The program runs for 1 hour, twice a week, for 4 weeks.

I was interested in conducting a case study of the Spring Reading Program and the effective strategies and techniques utilized to help children with learning disabilities grow and succeed. I was interested in observing what the program participants (children and tutors) experienced throughout the program. Specifically, I studied the techniques and strategies utilized by the tutors that demonstrated academic achievement for children with learning disabilities.

To achieve my research objectives, I conducted a qualitative, in-depth case study to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences with the tactics and



approaches used in the Spring Reading Program. First, I thoroughly described the Spring Reading Program by describing the numerous components and structure of the program. Secondly, I observed the 4 weeks of program. The purpose of observing the Spring Reading Program was to determine the strategies and techniques utilized within the program. Lastly, I included photographic evidence of the strategies and approaches that were used within the Spring Reading Program. Instead of completing a case study of specific individuals, I chose to look at the overall program. My observations were documented through photos and field notes.

### The Spring Reading Program Description

The Spring Reading Program is a 4-week, eight-session, literacy program offered through the Learning Disabilities Association of Niagara Region (LDANR) and Brock University. The program is only offered during the spring at Brock University. However, a very similar but longer program, Reading Rocks, is offered during the fall and winter at multiple locations throughout the Niagara Region. The Spring Reading Program is designed to support young vulnerable readers in the Niagara Region. Children participating in the Spring Reading Program are paired up with trained literacy tutors. The first session focuses on getting to know the children. Tutors have the opportunity to sit down and speak to both children and parents about the individual needs of the children. In addition tutors perform a pre-assessment, which focuses on phonics, sight words, fluency rates, comprehension, and phonemic awareness. These assessments provide tutors with vital information about the children's individual literacy needs allowing the tutors to begin creating a customized motivational workstation unique to the children's own interests, strengths, and literacy needs. For the length of the 4 weeks, each

tutor works one-on-one with the children focusing on the children's specific literacy needs in the four main literacy skill areas.

### 12-Minute Principle

Each hour-long session is divided into four 12-minute blocks dedicated to the main literacy components: phonics, sight word vocabulary, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. During the 12-minute blocks, tutors use direct and explicit instruction to assist children in learning and mastering new literacy skills. Once the new skill has been introduced to the children, the pair then participates in a related hands-on activity. This allows the learning to be fun and engaging for children. The 12-minute principle is efficient as it allows a variety of literacy skills to be taught within the hour-long session. In addition, extensive lengths of time spent on a task naturally results in children becoming disengaged from the task at hand as a result of boredom. The 12-minute principle is used in the Spring Reading Program, as it is effective in maintaining the children's engagement throughout each literacy task.

### Personalized Workstation

Children enrolled in the Spring Reading Program each have their own motivational workstation. This workstation consists of a tri-fold poster board decorated by both the children and assigned tutor. The purpose of the motivational workstation is to visually display the child growth throughout the program. This allows children to recognize and appreciate their literacy developments. The workstation is also designed to appeal to the interests of the children. This is a key aspect of the program, as this helps to capture children's interest initially in the program and to maintain their interest during the program.

### Graphing Success and Setting Goals

Near the end of each 12-minute block, children have time to graph their success and set goals for the following sessions. This is done with the guidance of the tutor. It is up to the tutor-child pair to decide how to graph the literacy gains (stickers, bar graphs, line graphs, etc.). The graphing process allows children to develop a sense of ownership over their learning. Through children viewing their gains, it helps increase children's motivation to engage in given literacy tasks and raise confidence.

In addition to graphing success, tutors also guide children in setting realistic goals for upcoming sessions. Goal setting is a significant element of the Spring Reading program. Each pair of tutors and children have conversations about what an attainable goal would be and determine a clear goal on what is hoped to achieve in the following session. There are two fundamental reasons behind the goal setting process. The primary purpose is the hope that when children realize that a goal is reachable, an enhanced sense of achievement and confidence will be developed. The following purpose is to instantaneously help children practice self-regulation skills through setting realistic goals and working towards meeting those goals.

### Participants of Reading Rocks

The Spring Reading Program is offered to children ages 5-12 in the Niagara Region exhibiting noteworthy difficulties in their reading due to a potential or diagnosed reading disability. To sign children up for the program, parents must first complete a Program Application Form and provide the LDANR with any available diagnosis reports and children's most recent school report card. To be qualified to participate in the program,

children must be performing below grade level in their reading and have a diagnosed or potential reading disability.

Although the Spring Reading program is offered by the Learning Disabilities Association of Niagara Region, children enrolled do not need to have a learning disability. A formal diagnosis of a learning disability is not a requirement for the program for two reasons. Primarily, many of the children enrolled in programs within the LDANR come from low-income families. A formal diagnosis of a learning disability can be costly and entailing a formal diagnosis for participation may cause some of the most vulnerable readers without the support they need. Furthermore, a formal diagnosis for a learning disability is usually not conducted until grade 3 or 4, resulting in children being up to two grade levels behind. Obliging a formal diagnosis would cause young struggling readers refusal to supportive intervention programs. Once submitted, the LDANR employees review the Program Application Form. If children meet the requirements for the program, children are then enrolled into the program and paired up with a literacy tutor.

#### Observations

Observational data gathered by a researcher provide greater and deeper knowledge of the experiences in the study (Cotton, D., Stokes & Cotton, P., 2010). To provide detail and evidence of whether the Spring Reading Program utilized tactics and approaches that assist vulnerable readers with academic success, I completed detailed field notes on four different areas of the program: hands-on activities, one-on-one instruction, engagement, and motivation. I recorded any observations that I believed demonstrated effectiveness in children's success. This included nonverbal cues, behaviour, conversations, words, etc.

During my observations of the Spring Reading Program, I wrote my field notes in various ways depending on my time and the observation. I jotted down brief words or phrases I heard. In addition, I documented both general description of observations and in-depth descriptions of observations. If two observations were similar or had something in common I made sure to note that immediately. I noted any questions that developed, themes that began to appear, and any connections that occurred.

#### Photographic Evidence

In addition to observation, I also used photographic evidence to explore how the Spring Reading Program demonstrated academic success through effective strategies and techniques. I incorporated many photos that displayed hands-on activities, one-on-one instruction, motivation, and engagement while participating in the Spring Reading program.

#### Data Analysis

Following the completion of the program, I continued to analyze the data I collected in order to draw out common themes and subthemes that became apparent during my observations. The photographs were also compared to the themes that emerged in the field notes. Themes that overlapped between the two methods were designated as the primary themes. As a result, comparing the themes from the field notes and photographs enhanced both the quality and quantity of the data collected.

The following chapter comprehensively examines the effective strategies and techniques evident in the Spring Reading Program demonstrating vital components that comprise the program.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Hands-on Activities

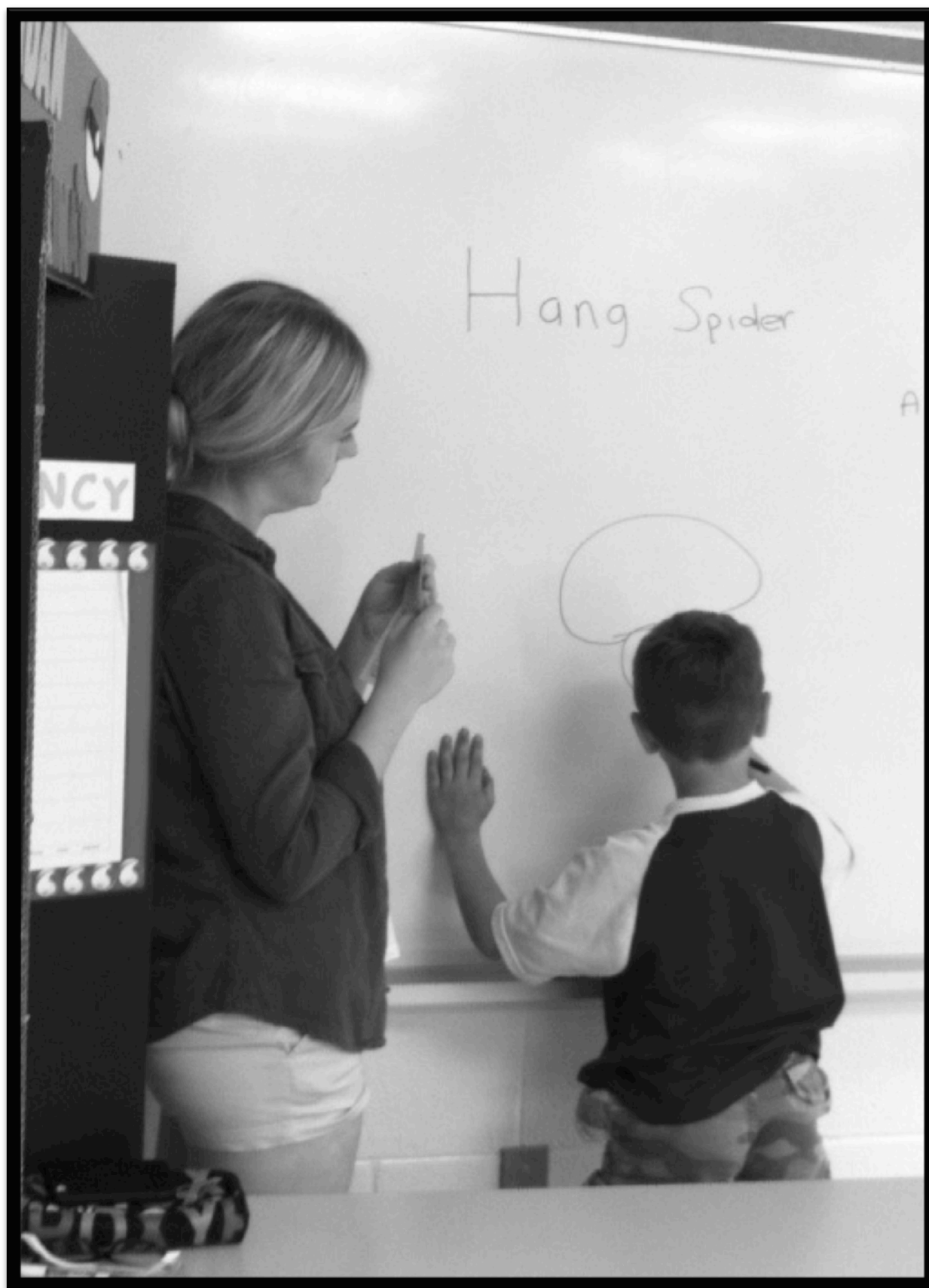
Hands-on activities are defined as a “range of interactions in which students use manipulative, role-played or engaged in projects” (Guthrie et al., 2006). Hands-on activities engage students both collaboratively and individually (Vacca, Vacca, & Mraz, 2005). Educators believe a stimulating task consists of hands-on activities (Guthrie et al., 2006). This is evident within the Spring Reading Program.

The Spring Reading Program is made up of four 12-minute blocks within a 1-hour session. The purpose of 12-minute block structure is to help motivate the children. Each session children are able to set attainable goals for each 12-minute block. This helps the children stay engaged and motivated to meet their goals. Each 12-minute block focused on an area of struggle such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, spelling, etc. Each instructional block began with introducing new concepts; for example, a new word, letter, or sound. This part of the instructional block focused on mastering the new concept. Once the individual has mastered the word, letter, or sound five times in a row, they move onto the hands-on activity. The tutor provided hands-on activities directed around the concepts they just mastered. This allowed the children to have fun and learn at the same time.

Research has demonstrated that in order to engage children’s brains efficiently, they need to be moving their hands (Guthrie et al., 2006). It has been discovered that when children participate in activities that require movement, such as talking and listening, the brain is activated in several areas (Guthrie et al., 2006). Additionally,

hands-on activities impact tactical/kinesthetic learners, auditory learners, and visual learners in significant ways (Guthrie et al., 2006).

Several empirical studies have demonstrated that children participating in the Spring Reading Program show significant improvement in their literacy skills. Through the incorporation of hands-on activities, children became more engaged. Children began to realize that the activities they were participating in are fun. In addition, children began to see that they were completing the games, resulting in more engagement and motivation to keep improving. Thus, the hands-on activities children participated in are meaningful and results demonstrated that they lead to improved reading skills in one or more area. Consequently, the National Reading Panel discovered that by incorporating literacy development into activities and games that are fun is essential in encouraging children's learning (National Reading Panel, 2000). Figure 2 can further demonstrate hands-on activities.



*Figure 2. Child and tutor playing hangman with sight words.*

Permission to release photo from LDNAR



Studies show that teachers use several activities within the classroom to build phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and oral guided reading. For instance, educators can use huge assortment of games within a learning environment. Any game can be turned into a literacy game/activity.

When creating or implementing activities, there are a few things one should keep in mind. The activities that are chosen should help children learn the names and sounds of the letters in the alphabet (National Institute for Literacy, 2009). In addition, the activities should help children be aware of the sounds in a spoken language and provide practice in manipulating the sounds (National Institute for Literacy, 2009). Within the Spring Reading Program, I often heard the tutors after the tutees if they could put the focused word in a sentence. It is also important that the activities support oral language development (National Institute for Literacy, 2009). As stated above, most games can be turned into a literacy activity; however, educators need to make sure that they are doing just that. While observing the Spring Reading Program, I noticed the tutor's activities and games were all directed towards literacy. For instance while playing Snakes and Ladders, the tutor and tutee took turns and on each turn they picked up a new word, stated the word, and said it in a sentence. If the word was correct, they moved that many spaces; if it was not correct they stayed where they were and the word returned to the pile. Finally, it is important to implement activities that include books or any type of print to help children understand how to print words (National Institute for Literacy, 2009).

While observing the Spring Reading Program, tutors used a wide range of games each session, which assisted children in improving their literacy skills. Hands-on activities included:

- Hole-Punch Cards
  - This game can be used for phonics, sight words, phonemes, letter names and sounds, blending and segmenting. Students receive a card with a letter (word or blend) in the center. The student hole punches the letter (word or blend) that matches the letter (word or blend) in the centre of the card. The card can include pictures to help the students find what they are looking for.
- Word Wheel
  - This game can be used for sight words. A word wheel is a two-page cut out that consists of a base page together with a wheel that spins around. On the center of the wheel is a word family ending. When the children spin the wheel, words that rhyme with that particular word family are formed. For instance, the word family –ake. When the children spin the wheel the letters r (rake), c (cake), b (bake), or s (snake) can appear. The children say the word and write it down. The children then continue spinning the wheel to form another word in the –ake family.
- Clothespin Clip-Ons
  - Clothespin can be used in a variety of ways to create literacy activities. Students receive clothespins with letters written on them and clip them

onto paint sticks in order to spell a word. This can also be altered for upper and lower case matching.

- Sentence Scramble
  - This activity is great for teaching sentence structure as well as sight words. You can create this yourself or online. To create this yourself, have the children cut up words from several sentences and rearrange the words into new sentences.
- Concentration
  - Concentration, otherwise known as memory, can be altered for most areas of literacy. Create two identical sets of cards, whether it is sight words, letters, blends, or create two different sets of cards that allow two cards to match in some way. This can be used for uppercase and lower case letters, same sound, different meaning, etc. Place cards face down. Take turns with the children to find the match. If children turn over two cards that do not match, they go back face down and it is the next persons turn. If turn cards are turned over and they match the individual, remove the cards from the playing area.
- Detective
  - Create a picture filled with words in a small font. Provide the children with a magnifying glass. The children need to find all the words with the magnifying glass and say them out loud. Figure 3 can further demonstrate the game detective.



*Figure 3.* Hands-on activity, detective.

Permission to release photo from LDNAR

- Ball Toss
  - Blow up a beach ball and write words, letters, and questions, etc., all over it. Throw the ball back and forth and wherever your hands land you need to say the word or answer the question.
  - Another way to play ball toss is to have small cups labelled with a word family, sounds (initial or final), etc. and balls with words or letters that correspond to one of the cups. Have the children throw the ball in the correct cup. Figure 4 can further demonstrate a variation of ball toss.



*Figure 4.* A variation of ball toss. The tutor has written words on the golf ball. The tutor tosses the ball to the tutee and she reads the word back too the tutor.

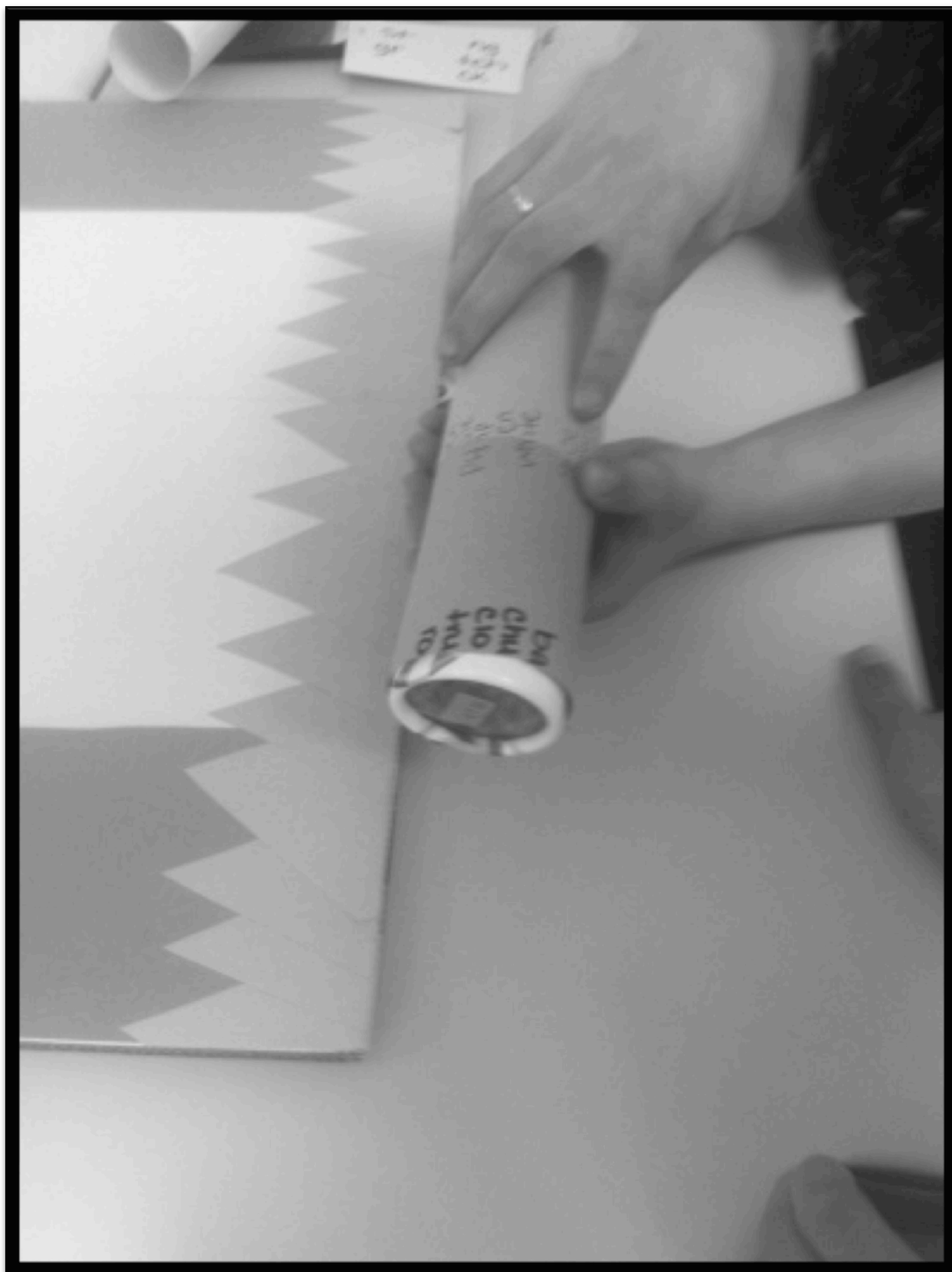
Permission to release photo from LDNAR

- Word Sort
  - Provide children with a large paper with two columns. Provide children with word families, initial sounds, final sound, verb/noun, capital letters, lower case, etc. and have them sort in the appropriate column. For instance, the two word families are –at and –ap. The word cat would go under the –at column and the word map would go under the –ap column.
- Alphabet Go Fish
  - This game is played the same way as Go Fish the card game. However, you are playing with words, letters, blends, etc.
- Bean Bag Toss
  - This game can be played with sight words, blends, and letters. Children throw a beanbag at a large chart paper with words or letters on it. Whatever the beanbag lands on, the child must say aloud. For instance, if the beanbag lands on the word “could” the child must say out loud “could.” If they say it correctly, they can remove the word and replace it with a new one.
- Phonics Flip
  - This is a flip chart that assists children in both spelling and sounding out words. It is divided into three or four sections for a three or four-letter word. Each section is labelled a-z. Here you can add in blends as well. Children are able to flip through to make certain words. They discover if

they are making a word or not. For instance, “P-A-G” is not a word but “T-A-G” is.

- Tic Tac Toe
  - This game can be played in a variety of ways. One way is to place a letter or word on each square. In order to place an X or O in the square, one must pronounce the letter or word.
- Board Games (Any board game can be made into a literacy game)
- Hangman
- Rain stick
  - Create a rain stick that can twist opposite ways in the center. Have blends written on the left side and word endings on the right. Have the children match the blend with a word ending by twisting the rain stick to meet the proper blend/word. Have the children pronounce the blend and word ending separately as well as together. Figure 5 can further demonstrate rain stick activities.





*Figure 5.* Tutor and Child using rain stick to work on blends.

Permission to release photo from LDNAR

- Fly Swat
  - Write down words on a large piece of paper. Say a word or sound, letter, etc. and the child needs to swat the correct term on the paper.
- Going Fishing
  - Create a fishing rod by using a long piece of string and connecting a magnet to the bottom. Scatter magnetic word cards (or another area of literacy) on the floor. Call out a word and the children will use their fishing rod to catch the correct word.
- PIG
  - Turn word cards upside down and spread them over the table. The first player declares how many words he/she thinks he/she can correctly read (1-4) before getting a PIG or STOP card. He/she then chooses one card at a time and reads each word as he/she chooses the card. His/her turn continues until the individual reads his/her number declared, misses a word, or he/she draws either a PIG or STOP card. A STOP card automatically ends the turn. The children may keep any words chosen and read correctly. A PIG card automatically ends the turn and any words chosen and read correctly have to go back on the table. Play continues until only the 4 PIG and 4 STOP cards remain.
- BINGO
  - This is great for all literacy skills.

- Sand Writing
  - Using a cookie sheet filled with sand, call out a word, letter, uppercase/lowercase and have the children write it in the sand.
- Fun worksheets
- Roll, Say, Keep
  - Using the Roll, Say, Keep game board, place a card face up in each space. Leave the remaining card in a pile. Players take turns rolling the die and reading the card in the appropriate space. If the player can read the card, he/she keeps it and replaces the card with another from the pile.
- Word Searches

It is important that educators implement hands-on activities while working with children with learning disabilities. The tutors in the Spring Reading Program planned their activities based on the individual needs of the children. Thus, based on the age of the children and their reading ability, they altered their activities to meet the children's needs. Once the children are able to master the concepts (words, letters, sounds, blends) within the activity, the activity can easily be altered to fit the individual's needs.

Another important reminder while implementing hands-on activities in the instruction of literacy is to use a variety of activities. While observing the Spring Reading Program, I saw the tutors changing the hands-on activities each session. This allowed the children to stay engaged in the activity. If one consistently was using the same activity to teach the literacy skill, children are going to become bored and disengaged. Using the same hands-on activity while teaching literacy is great, as long as

it is not used on a continuous basis and that the activities are varied throughout the lessons.

Research has demonstrated the positive effects of implementing hands-on activities within a learning environment (Guthrie et al., 2006). The Spring Reading Program revealed the effectiveness of this strategy through children's successes. While observing the program, I was able to see how engaged children were in each activity. They were happy, cheering when they succeeded in the specific activity, and driven to not give up. Overall, I believe it is essential that educators implement hands-on activities in their literacy instruction to provide academic success for all children, especially children with learning disabilities.

### Motivation

Motivation towards literacy is essential in becoming a successful reader. Research demonstrates that a main reason children struggle with literacy is because they have low motivation to read (Melekoglu, 2011). When one has low motivation to read, they usually portray low academics. This is described as "The Matthew effect." Specifically, this refers to "a pattern of increasing advantage or disadvantage following initial advantage or disadvantage" (Morgan et al., 2008). According to Morgan et al., children who foster rapid acquisition of reading skills, also known as the reading rich, not only read more frequently, but also begin to enjoy reading at a young age. However, children who portray difficulty acquiring reading skills, also known as the reading poor, develop a negative attitude for reading and practice less frequently (Morgan et al., 2008). Therefore, over time, the better readers get better and the poor readers become poorer. Accordingly, motivation to read is critical for everyone with and without a learning disability in order

to be academically successful. Overall, educators should be promoting children motivation to read, especially those with learning disabilities.

“Motivation to read holds a vital promise for improving the effectiveness of reading interventions in school” (Melekoglu, 2011). Research demonstrates that literacy failure has long-term effects such as self-confidence, motivation to learn, and future school performance (Armbruster et al., 2010). As such, educators need to incorporate a variety of ways of enhancing motivation and interest into their literacy lessons and hands-on activities (National Reading Panel, 2000).

The Spring Reading Program was created to help children improve their literacy skills while providing constant motivation for the children. While observing The Spring Reading Program, I noticed the tutors incorporated motivation very effectively. Specifically, by including hands-on, stimulating and engaging literacy activities, enthusiasm and motivational boards, it kept the tutees very determined.

Within the Spring Reading Program, I observed that while the children were engaging in both the instructional aspect of the block or the hands-on activity, the tutors were consistently portraying a great amount of enthusiasm. This was seen in a variety of ways including tone and volume of voices, facial expression, body language, encouragement, praise, and providing feedback. In particular, when children won a game, increased fluency, mastered a word or phoneme, the tutors displayed excitement and always praised and congratulated the children. Furthermore, I noticed that as a result of the tutors demonstrating excitement, the children’s motivation and enjoyment increased. Parents expressed that their children looked forward to coming each night, how their children left sessions happy, and that their children wanted to read at home.

Another important aspect of the Spring Reading Program that I observed from the beginning to the end was motivational workstations. Motivational workstations are a form of graphic organizers in which academic success is exemplified (Scruton & McNamara, 2014). During the first session of the Spring Reading Program, the tutors gathered information about the child and the child's interests in order to assist in developing a motivational workstation. They used a tri-fold board to create a motivational workstation for their children based on their individual interests. Both the tutor and child worked together throughout the Spring Reading Program to create and develop their workstation. To begin the process, a basic framework was created which included the three to four literacy skills (areas of difficulty), which would be focused on each session. I noticed that when tutors had spent time creating a board with the child and based the board on the child's interests, it was more motivating for the child. In particular, the child began developing a sense of possession over their learning (Scruton & McNamara, 2014). For instance, a child is interested in Pokémon and, as a result, the tutor and child created a motivational workstation with a Pokémon theme. When the children mastered their sight words, they were able to add the sight word to the board by placing a picture of a Pokémon character with the word in the center. The child wanted to continue adding pictures of the characters onto the board. Figure 6 can further demonstrate motivational workstations.

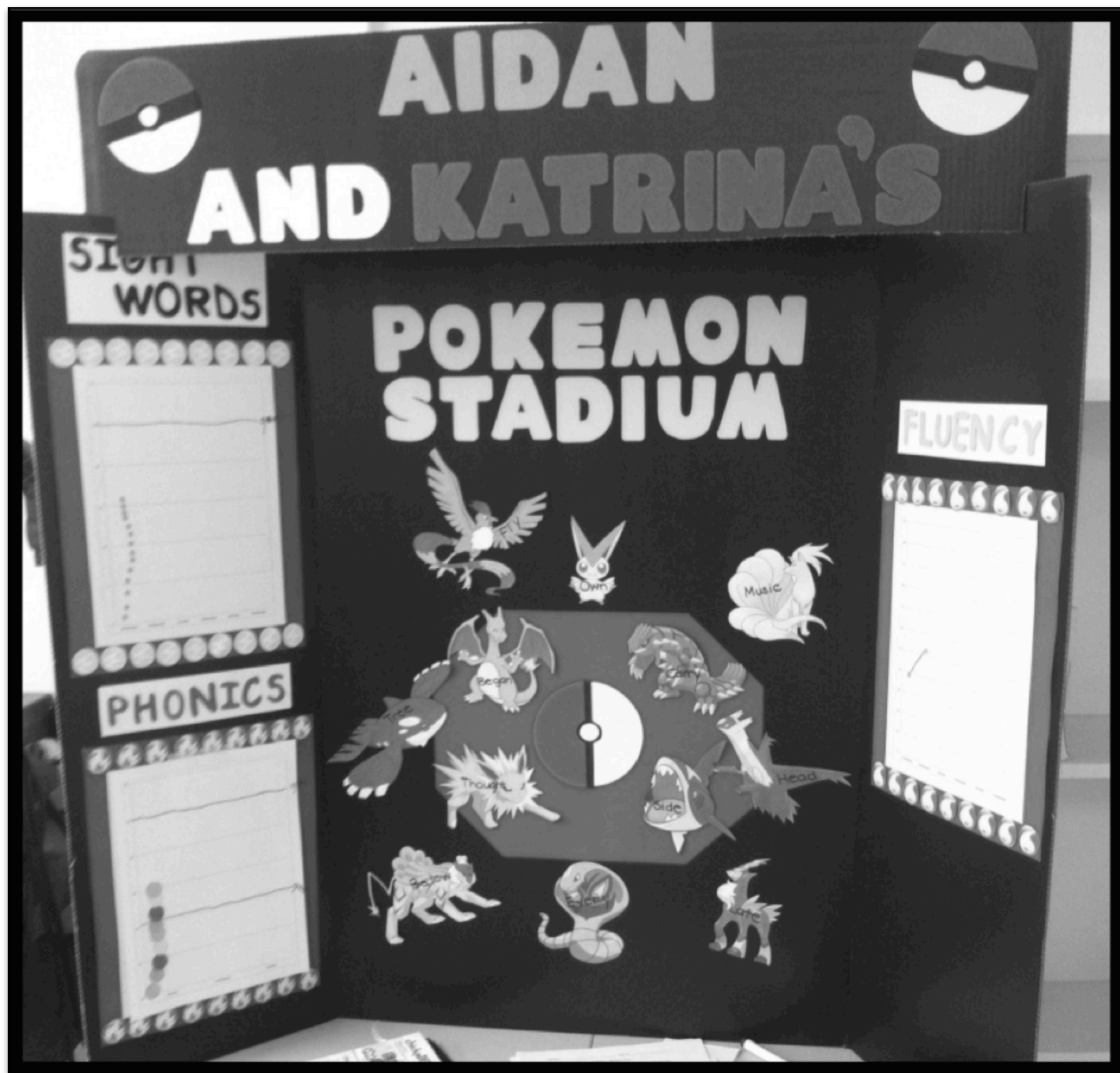


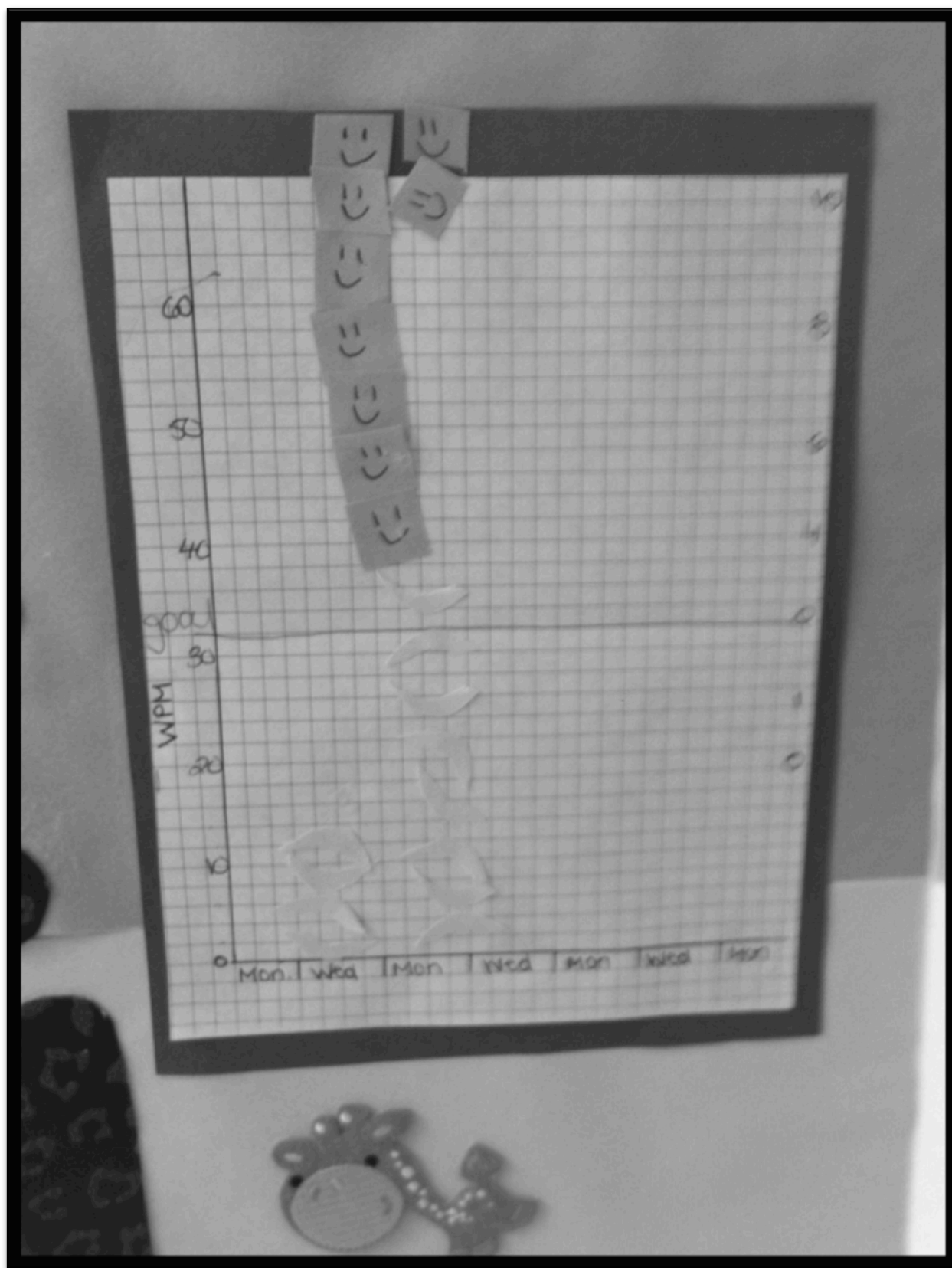
Figure 6. A motivational workstation that incorporates the child's interest of Pokémon.

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The tutors also created graphs for each instruction block. This allowed the children to track their success by graphing their achievements. At the end of the instructional block, the tutor and child determined what the child mastered during the 12-minute instructional block. The child then graphed his/her success on a bar graph or line graph using markers, stickers, etc.

In addition to children graphing their success on the motivational workstation, the tutor and child set realistic goals of what they would like to accomplish next session. This strategy promotes the idea of children engaging in their own learning in order to meet their goals. The tutor and child collaboratively set attainable goals to reach the following sessions. I observed numerous conversations between the tutors and children about their current accomplishments and attainable future achievements. Also, at the beginning of each instructional block, many tutors discussed with their children about their specific goal for a specific literacy skill. Most tutors and tutees documented the goal on their graphs. This allowed the children to see their own success immediately and track their success over time. In addition, this helps children's motivation increase through observing and reflecting on their success. I noted that tutors were consistently accentuating achievements through positive feedback in order to assist the children in reaching their goals. Furthermore, as a result of the children contributing to their motivational workstation design, they demonstrated a greater interest in their learning. Overall, many children with learning disabilities have difficulty when comparing their accomplishment with the goals set prior to taking on the task. Within the Spring Reading Program, children learn how to monitor their own learning and provide feedback. Figure 7 can further demonstrate literacy progress.





*Figure 7.* Child and Tutor track the progress of Fluency. Each day the child added stickers to her graph. This graph also displays a set goal. It is evident the child has exceeded this goal.

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Many children with learning disabilities already possess a low motivation for literacy (Melekoglu, 2011). Unfortunately, this results in a low desire to read, leading to an overall low confidence in children's self. However, I noted since the tutors in the Spring Reading Program consistently motivated their tutees throughout the session, the children's confidence in their ability to read began improving. For instance, after children and tutors graphed their accomplishment, they conversed about how they reached their goal. This allows the children to understand the factors that contributed to their success creating motivation and a sense of efficacy. Due to the consistent praising and rewarding the children received through this tutoring program, tutees were able to develop more confidence in their reading skills. By the end of the program, all children displayed more confidence in their specific area of difficulty, whether it was their letters, letter sounds, phonemic awareness, sight words, fluency, comprehension, etc. Even though those areas were of difficulty for the children, I noted that children wanted to focus on that area; they wanted to meet their goals and graph their new success. Thus, not only does this tutoring program foster motivation, but also through steady motivation, children's self-esteem was additionally increased.

The Spring Reading Program was designed in a way that allows children to stay engaged and motivated. In particular, the program does not spend more than 12 minutes on each instructional block, resulting in the activities changing at a rapid pace. As a result, children are less likely to become distracted and disengaged. Thus, stimulating short instructional blocks allow children with learning disabilities to stay motivated and engaged, leading to greater academic improvement.

Subsequently, all children displayed a positive correlation between the Spring Reading Program and motivation. While observing the Spring Reading Program, it was evident that it was a positive experience for children, where their motivation to read and participate in literacy was enhanced. I noted the children's motivation levels increasing from the first day to the last day of the program. Some children were very apprehensive of coming and participating in the program, however, once the children discovered that there were other children in the program and that it was fun, they displayed higher levels of motivation. Children often asked their tutors at the end of the night when they would be coming back.

It is essential that educators apply motivational tactics while working with children with learning disabilities. Motivational strategies are vital components of the learning process. From my observations, it was evident that as a result of how the Spring Reading Program was created, the way it was implemented, and how the children experienced it, it provided the children with the ability to become increasingly motivated. In addition, due to the tutors creating a fun and engaging atmosphere, the children appeared motivated to continue read.

#### One-On-One Instruction

“One-to-one literacy instruction is an effective means of accelerating literacy skills” (Houge, Geier, & Peyton, 2008). Research demonstrates that children with learning disabilities who receive one-on-one instruction portray greater academic success than those who receive whole group or small group instruction (Vadasy et al., 2000). Numerous researchers over the past decades have examined the effectiveness of one-on-

one literacy instruction for children with learning disabilities (Elbaum et al., 2000, Vadasy et al., 2000).

For those individuals who are learning disabled, the absence of daily one-on-one instruction is an even bigger factor in their success (Elbaum et al., 2000). However, if children with learning disabilities are able to receive the individualized instruction in addition to regular classroom time, the chances of increasing their academic achievement is very high. Empirical studies demonstrate that not only does an individualized instruction provide children with learning disabilities with academic success, these results also revealed that even when these children are no longer participating in a reading program they still have the ability to outperform their nontutored peers (Vadasy et al., 2000).

The Spring Reading Program was designed in a way that allowed children to receive the extra support they need outside of the classroom. Each children that partakes in this program was paired up with a tutor and received one-on-one instruction. As a result, this allowed the children to get the most out of this program.

While observing the Spring Reading Program, it was evident that the one-on-one instruction allowed the tutors a better chance to get to know the individual needs of their tutee. If a tutor was placed in a smaller group setting or paired, they would not have the time to get to know the children and their individual needs. From my observations, I believe that the one-on-one instruction was a key element that attributed to the Spring Reading Program's success. Consequently, the one-on-one instruction allowed the children to receive the specific attention they need. Furthermore, I noted that due to the one-on-one instruction, the children were getting consistent attention from their tutors.

During this one-on-one time, the children were participating in hands-on activities and receiving encouragement from their tutor. Thus, the focus was solely on the children and not other individuals around them. Figure 8 can further demonstrate one-on-one instruction.



*Figure 8.* Working on sight words one-on-one.

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In my observations, I noticed that the tutors were very good at keeping the children engaged. The children were not given the opportunity to be distracted. This is because the tutors were focused on the one child and not a small group. Thus, it was almost impossible for the children to become off-task as the instructional blocks moved rapidly and the tutees were continually kept engaged. For instance, I observed a tutor and child begin the session by going over the sight words from the previous session. The tutor then introduced new sight words (one at a time) and had the child repeat the word and place it in a sentence. The tutor and child repeated this process for about 4 minutes going through each word several times. After this was completed, they played Concentration. When a word was flipped over, the child said the word whether the pair was found or not. The tutor provided consistent positive encouragement and instructional feedback during the game. When the game was finished, the child then graphed his/her success with stickers on his motivation board. When finished graphing, the tutor and child took a short break before moving onto the next instructional block. Consequently, there was no time for the child to become off-task. Overall, the one-on-one instruction kept him/her on task during each session.

When observing this literacy program, it was apparent that the one-on-one support provided by the tutors aided the children to recognize their potentials. During the first session, not only did the tutors take the time to sit down with the children and the parents in order to get to know the child, the tutors completed a pre-assessment on phoneme awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and sight words. Based on the results and the information gathered from tutee and parents, the tutor designs a reading program that both challenges and motivates children and addresses their individual needs. The tutor

designed activities that are tailored to the child's interests and areas of difficulties. This assisted the children in becoming more interested and involved in their learning. As the program continued, children began displaying more commitment to their successes. Thus, individualized instruction played a crucial role in the children's successes. Overall, it was evident that one-on-one literacy instruction that included lesson plans and trained tutors are effective tools in children's academic achievements.

Seemly, one-on-one instruction poses significant benefits to children participating in literacy instruction. In my observations, it was evident that the one-on-one instruction allowed for the children to receive specific attention that focused directly on their individual needs. Consequently, the combination of positive reinforcement, tracking success, and hands-on activities through the one-on-one instruction plays a significant role in children's academic successes.

It is important that educators implement time for individualized instruction with children with learning disabilities. Educators do not have to spend hours providing one-on-one instruction. As seen in my observations, spending 12 minutes focusing on one area of difficulty a few times a week will demonstrate improvement in children with learning disabilities' academic successes. The tutors in the Spring Reading Program provided one-on-one instruction for 1 hour twice a week. They focused on four different areas of difficulty for 12 minutes each. Results demonstrated academic gains when receiving one-on-one instruction. Thus, providing children with that extra bit of one-on-one time will result in an improvement of literacy skills, whether it is a little bit or a lot. It should not matter how much one is improving; any improvement is a great achievement and should be recognized and celebrated.



Another important reminder while implementing one-on-one instruction is to only focus on one area of difficulty for a short amount of time. As noted, the Spring Reading Program kept their tutees engaged by the rapid pace of instruction. The tutors spent 12 minutes with their child, going through acquisition of the skills and a hands-on activity. Once this was completed, they went on to graph their success and moved onto the next instruction block. If children spend a long period of time on a literacy skill, they will start to become distracted and disengaged. Thus, it is critical that children with LD receive one-on-one instruction; however, the structure of the one-on-one instruction must be balanced and engaging.

It is evident there is a positive relationship between one-on-one instruction and children with learning disabilities. The Spring Reading program exhibited the significance of this technique. During my time observing this reading program, I noted how involved the children were from the start of each session to the end. They were very focused on the specific task at hand as well as on their tutor. Consequently, I believe it is vital for educators to carry out one-on-one literacy instruction several times a week in order to provide opportunities for academic success in children with learning disabilities.

### Engagement

Engagement is defined as “a multidimensional attribute including behavioural engagement (actively performing academic learning tasks), cognitive engagement (using high-level strategies to foster deep learning) and emotional engagement (enjoying academic tasks and expressing enthusiasm about learning)” (Wigfield et al., 2008). Being actively engaged during literacy instruction is essential to children’s knowledge and skill development (Laveault, 2003). All children need to be actively engaged in their learning

process (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). Research reveals engagement in literacy is the combined performance of motivational processes and cognitive strategies (Wigfield et al., 2008). As a result, children who are highly engaged in literacy are both motivated and strategic, where children who are less engaged portray decreased motivation and utilize strategies less (Wigfield et al., 2008).

Engagement and motivation are associated expressions that are often used interchangeably in literature. However, in terms of literacy instruction, they differentiate from one another. As stated above, engagement refers to a multidimensional concept that includes behavioural, cognitive, and emotional attributes that are incorporated with being strongly involved in a literacy activity (Wigfield et al., 2008). Motivation is defined as an energizer and director of behaviour and is related to the beliefs, values, and goals of the particular activity. Consequently, motivation relates to engagement but can be distinguished from it.

Motivation is critical to children's literacy engagement. Research demonstrates that engagement reflects children's motivated actions (Wigfield et al., 2008). For instance, when children are motivated to read, they are more engaged in reading. While observing this reading program, I noticed a great increase in all the children's engagement in literacy from the beginning to the end of the program. Specifically, many children who came to the program were unexcited initially with no desire to engage in literacy-based activities; however, children began coming in happy and eager to learn. At the beginning of the program, the children came with little or no motivation to read; thus, they were less inclined to engage in the literacy activities in front of them. Once they began to realize they were capable of learning, they became more engaged in the activities at hand.

Consequently, through the combination of one-on-one, hands-on activities, and positive reinforcement, the children at the Spring Reading Program were able to become more engaged in literacy and believe in their capabilities.

Researchers believe that engagement in literacy instruction is vital to children's development of literacy skills and overall academic achievement (Guthrie, Wigfield, & You, 2012). Engagement in literacy instruction results in motivated individuals that use strategies to comprehend, construct meaning, and socially interact (Guthrie et al., 2012). Engagement includes behavioural engagement, cognitive engagement, and emotional engagement (Guthrie et al., 2012). Thus, in order to help children with learning disabilities increase their engagement in literacy, they must acquire behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement. For instance, children must be involved directly in literacy activities in order to acquire behavioural engagement (Guthrie et al., 2012). This includes positive behaviour, determination, perseverance, and participation. In order to be emotionally engaged, children must portray positive or negative affective reactions to the activity and to whom they do the activity with (Guthrie et al., 2012). This can include brief displays of interest, boredom, anxiety, and frustration before feeling happy, excited, and eager. Finally, in addition to utilizing self-regulatory strategies, children must display a willingness to apply the mental effort when encountering challenging concepts and difficult tasks in order to be cognitively engaged (Guthrie et al., 2012).

The presence of the three types of engagement was evident in the Spring Reading Program. The tutors did a great job of incorporating the tutees in their own learning process. For instance, I noticed that for each session one tutor would always ask his/her child what is the order they would like to work on things today. The child would then

pick the order of the instructional blocks and they would begin. This allowed the child to have a say in the planning process of the task order, resulting in more engagement within each block. In addition, the child knew what to expect for the next instructional block, which displayed a greater enjoyment of the tasks at hand, a more positive attitude, determination, and overall engagement.

Emotional engagement was also prominent within the Spring Reading Program. The children, at one point, went through a range of emotions while engaging in literacy-based activities. Whether they were excited and happy when mastering a word or phoneme, frustrated when unable to figure it out, or angry when they made a mistake. Thus, these children expressed both positive and negative emotional engagement on a regular basis towards the activity and/or tutor. For instance, children and a tutor were playing Bean Bag Toss. The tutor instructed the child to throw the beanbag and whichever word it landed on the child needed to say correctly. The child was unable to say the word correctly several times and began to show frustration towards the game and anger towards the tutor. The tutor responded each time by helping the child sound out the word, repeat the word, and put it in a sentence. After another turn, the child correctly pronounced the word and the anger and frustration turned into excitement and relief.

Cognitive engagement became increasingly evident throughout the sessions. I noticed as the children began to develop more confidence in their capabilities they were much more able to handle challenging tasks and concepts. For instance, the child became very frustrated when he/she repeatedly said the word incorrectly. Many sessions later the same child encountered a similar situation; however, instead of displaying anger and frustration, he/she displayed much determination to sound out a word correctly. This is a

result of developing many strategies, including as self-regulation, to assist in their cognitive exertions.

In order to assist the growth and development of literacy skills in children with learning disabilities we need to encourage them to be intrinsically motivated. When they become intrinsically motivated, they will want to participate in literacy activities for the knowledge and enjoyment (Guthrie et al., 2012). In addition, educators need to teach children with LD how to use techniques such as self-monitoring and inferencing to understand literacy instruction.

Before participating in the Spring Reading Program, many children were disengaged cognitively, specifically in regards to literacy-based tasks. Consequently, small instructional blocks with reduced distractions play a critical role in children's academic success and the development of self-efficacy. The Spring Reading Program was structured to keep the children engaged in literacy-based activities. This was apparent in various ways. The program was designed with four 12-minute instructional blocks, which allowed the activities and tasks to change at a rapid pace limiting the chance of children becoming disengaged and distracted. In addition, in instructional blocks, such as sight words and phonics, the tutors only introduced five or less new concepts. The tutor and child would solely focus on those concepts for the few first minutes and then incorporate them into a game with their previous mastered concepts. If children received more than five new concepts, it would become very overwhelming and frustrating for them.

Moreover, throughout the program, tutors and children are actively engaged in the development of the motivational workstation. When the motivational board is designed

around the children's' interest, the children become further engaged in the literacy instruction process. Furthermore, when children are able to view their success on a regular basis, they become more aware of their capabilities and become driven to meet their goals. Thus, they increase their engagement. Figure 9 can further demonstrate engagement.



*Figure 9. Goals.* In this picture, a child has just reached their sight word goal and is excitedly picking out stickers for her graph.

Permission to release photo from LDNAR

Another aspect of the Spring Reading Program that I observed to increase children's engagement in the process was the consistent feedback. This helped direct the children and assisted them to be aware of their engagement during the literacy activity. They are able to be active in their own learning by developing meaning, self-regulating, setting goals, and using effective strategies. Overall, I noticed that the frequent feedback increased the children's eagerness and desire to engage in the activities

Research demonstrates the importance of providing children with LD opportunity to engage in literacy activities (Laveault, 2003). These activities include observing others read, enjoying and discussing books, reading familiar books, acting out and retelling stories, sharing experiences, and observing and connecting print with their meaning. When educators create a type of environment that includes these types of activities, they will begin to engage the interest of the children from various backgrounds and guarantee that they will enhance their comprehension when reading (Laveault, 2003). In addition, making sure the children are focused and engaged during the literacy instruction is also essential (Laveault, 2003). The material must be meaningful and engaging for the children. In particular, the topics must be engaging (Laveault, 2003). In addition, time needs to be provided to discuss and reflect on the activity or reading (Laveault, 2003). While observing the Spring Reading Program, it was evident that the tutors provided a variety of literacy activities that engaged the interests of each child. This included meaningful and interesting topics. I noted that during the last 10 minutes of each session, if time allotted, many tutors would read to their children, while they sat back and relaxed. One tutor, in particular, still made sure her tutee was actively engaged in this activity. For instance, the book was *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and before reading the tutor and



child recapped what they have already read and predicted what they thought might happen. While reading the book, the tutors engaged the children by encouraging the children to make more predictions, verifying predictions, search for meaning, and building interpretations of the book. In addition, the tutor pointed out challenging words and ideas as well as identified some problems and encouraged the child to predict solutions. I noted the children bringing in their own personal experiences to what was being read in the book. After they had read the chapter (or a few pages), they would reflect on what they just read. In addition, the tutor had the child summarize the chapter back to her. As a result, the tutor was able to ensure that the child remained focused and engaged in the reading process. Figure 10 can further demonstrate engagement in literacy activities.



*Figure 10.* Cup Toss. In this illustration the child is actively engaged in trying to toss a word into the correct cup.

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In general, it was evident that all tutors kept their children engaged for the sessions. Tutors picked activities and books that sparked interest in their tutees. For instance, the child in the above example was currently into *the Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series so it was only obvious the child and tutor would spend some time each session and read part of the book. This provides children with autonomy support, where they are giving the children some control over their own learning.

Overall, it is critical that educators present a variety of engagement opportunities while working with children with learning disabilities. Within this case study, it is evident that engagement in literacy instruction is crucial to children's academic success. From my observations, it was apparent that the Spring Reading Program demonstrated the effectiveness of this tactic through the children's achievement. The Spring Reading Program incorporated engagement through an assortment of ways. This included motivational work boards, children's individual interests, children being involved in their learning process, the 12-minute instructional blocks, consistent feedback, modeling, explaining, hands-on activities, rapid pace, meaningful and interesting topics, etc. Overall, I believe it is necessary that educators create engaging literacy based instruction in order for children with LD to achieve and exceed academically.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

A variety of possibilities exist to further research on the connection between effective instructional strategies and academic success for children with reading disabilities. This study focused specifically around effective teaching approaches and vulnerable reader's academic success in literacy tasks. Consistent with the aims of this study, further research would benefit from a comparison of how strategies are utilized in the Spring Reading program between different tutor-child pairs. As this study looked at the Spring Reading program as a whole, including more case studies on participants, would allow for a deeper understanding into the similarities and differences between the strategies tutors utilize and the effectiveness of each strategy towards children's successes.

Longitudinal findings may also track any changes to children academically during and after participating in the program. It would be interesting to understand whether or not some of these strategies, such as hands-on activities, are carried on after the program when the children perform literacy tasks. Academic improvement could then be compared between children who return to the program and children who do not return to the program.

Lastly, another area that may be of value to future research studies would be to include the perspective of the parents of the child participants. The parents may provide insight into any changes they may have noticed throughout the program with respect to children's academic achievement. Adding an outsider's view of the effects strategy use in

the program can provide an additional element to the understanding of goal setting in the Spring Reading Program.

The findings from this study hold several implications for policy, practice, parents and teachers. Literacy intervention programs aimed at supporting vulnerable readers can use these research findings to appreciate how certain techniques and strategies can provide academic success for children with learning disabilities. The intervention program that would specifically benefit from the research data is the Spring Reading program. As the Learning Disabilities Association of Niagara Region (LDANR) offers the Reading Rocks program, the results of this study provide the LDANR with insight into how their program positively affects children with learning difficulties academic achievement. This insight can offer support with training the tutors, in particular, how specific strategies and approaches significantly influence vulnerable readings academic attainment.

The findings of this research study can also be applied to educational settings. Educators are faced with the difficult responsibility of utilizing particular tactics and strategies that can support children with learning disabilities. Although it is understood that a one-on-one tutoring program cannot be paralleled with the responsibility of teaching upwards of 25 children, teachers struggle to find teaching techniques that aid children with learning disabilities academically. As a result of implementing specific techniques and strategies into their classrooms, they can positively affect the direction children with learning disabilities take through explicit, intensive, and extensive literacy instruction. Effective teaching approaches can be an area for educators to explore with unenthusiastic learners.

### Limitations

Although providing valuable insight into policy and practice for literacy programs aimed at supporting children with learning disabilities, there are a number of limitations that should be addressed as they may have hindered the quality of the presentation. First, due to time constraints, the study aimed at researching a 4-week literacy program with 10 child-tutor pairs. This presented a small population and timeline to observe. Although this program provided valuable information, the data may have been seen as unreliable. This makes it difficult to generalize the results of research to a wider population. The location of the program site to be studied was previously determined as the Spring Reading Program only runs each year during the spring. Thus, having multiple locations and longer duration would have been more beneficial to the study as well as ensure the accurateness of the results.

Secondly, the data came from my observations of the program and not the participants involved. All children learn and experience situations differently and as such cannot be generalized to all participants in the Spring Reading Program. In addition, it is understood that when children are consciously being observed, they may alter their behaviour. Consequently, the data may have been different than what the participants actually felt.

### Concluding Thoughts

The goal of this case study was to explore effective strategies and techniques that assist children with learning disabilities academic achievement while participating in a

literacy program known as the Spring Reading program. Through hands-on activities, motivation, engagement, and one-on-one instruction, the program proved to be successful in providing effective tactics that improved children's academic success. Moreover, these strategies go hand-in-hand and can be used when teaching literacy to children 5 to 12 years of age. The results revealed that literacy programs are beneficial to children with learning disabilities in improving their academic success through specific techniques and strategies.

As a result of providing these children with stimulating hands-on activities, they begin to engage efficiently, have fun, and develop a motivation to keep improving. By providing motivation towards literacy, children's entire attitude towards reading changed in a positive way. Through the motivational boards, praising, and feedback, children will realize their capabilities and how to reach their goals. Engagement in literacy allowed the children to become involved in their own learning process, feel different ranges of emotions towards the activity and tutor, and create strategies to help handle challenging concepts and tasks. Finally, one-on-one instruction allowed children to (a) develop rapport with tutors, (b) have their needs met, (c) receive individual attention, (d) remain engaged, and (d) help the children recognize their potentials.

In conclusion, one-on-one, hands-on, motivational, and engaging literacy instruction has the greatest impact on children with learning disabilities. It is vital that future literacy programs take into consideration the various techniques that they can implement into their literacy-based tasks in order to achieve the best results for children. The Spring Reading Program and prior research demonstrate that these strategies, when implemented into literacy instruction, are significant in improving children's academic,

behavioural, emotional, and social development. This case study reflects the importance of literacy instruction for children with learning disabilities.

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